



## Sequoia National Park Hosts Gathering of Fire Communications Program

It was quiet in the forest except for the sound of snowshoes crunching through the white powder....and an occasional giggle. Two dozen National Park Service fire educators, dressed in bright layers of fleece and wool, followed a park ranger as he navigated through a maze of giant, ancient trees. Scarred by fire but still dependent on it, the trees stood as examples of survival for the onlookers who were getting ready for a challenging future.



This scene occurred in February 2004 at Sequoia National Park when 21 participants attended a three-day workshop to strengthen the National Wildland Fire Communications and Education Program. *Leading Fire Communications into the Future* was organized by the Fire Management Program Center in Boise, Idaho.

Kicking off the workshop, Superintendent Richard H. Martin expressed Sequoia's pride in supporting the national program by serving as host. "As a manager, I know the importance of communicating with the public and our partners about how fire management serves the National Park Service mission," Martin said.



Workshop participants enjoyed more than a dozen programs and panel discussions presented by NPS regional and park personnel, United States Geological Survey researchers, air quality regulators, public relations professionals, and social scientists. The organized sessions offered valuable opportunities for participants to share ideas, review accomplishments, and trouble-shoot current challenges.

One of the major themes for the workshop was fostering a productive relationship between interpretation and fire management. Interpreters are an integral part of any education program because they don't just disseminate information, but make it meaningful and relevant for the audience. As Sequoia National Park's Chief of Interpretation stood below the scarred trees in his snowshoes, he created meaning for his current group of fire educators. He talked about ecology, resource management, politics, and public expectations – all subjects that the participants could take home and personalize to meet future challenges in their own areas.

The National Wildland Fire Communications and Education Program consists of approximately twenty employees working to promote fire management activities across the nation. These employees are scattered around the country in national, regional, and park offices. Due to this geographic distribution, annual gatherings are an important part of evaluating and ensuring the success of the program over time. The Sequoia workshop was the third gathering of its kind. This group met in Boise, Idaho in November 2001 and in Santa Fe, New Mexico in February 2003.